

# CHAPTER 3

## TOP MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP: SHOWING YOUR COMMITMENT

### INTRODUCTION

An effective company process takes commitment from top management. That commitment is essential, and it must be visible.

In this chapter we will describe ways to provide visible leadership. Ideally, this means involvement in a program that shows concern for every aspect of the safety and health of all workers throughout the site. Therefore, we have included a description of a system for ensuring that contract workers are both protected from hazards and prevented from endangering employees of the owner-company.

Successful top managers use a variety of techniques that visibly involve them in the safety and health aspect of their workers. Look for methods that fit your style and your worksite. These methods generally can be classified as:

- Getting out where you can be seen,
- Being accessible
- Being an example, and
- Taking charge.

### GETTING OUT WHERE YOU CAN BE SEEN

In recent years, we often hear the phrase “management by walking around.” This describes a manager who frequents all parts of the operation, getting to know the people who make it happen, and seeing firsthand what is working well and what isn’t. This can succeed not only as a tool for management but also as a message to employees. Employees who see the manager “walking around” will likely come to believe that he/she cares about what managers are doing and how well they are doing it. And when they see that certain areas – like safety and health – interest the top brass, employees become more aware of these areas.

A manager who stops to get hazardous conditions or practices corrected as he/she walks through operations areas impresses workers with the importance of health and safety. As you conduct your walk through, be particularly aware of short cuts in safe work procedures that are being taken to speed production. The involved manager knows that short cuts that cancel safety and health precautions are a form of Russian roulette. It is only a matter of time until an employee gets hurt.

Compliment workers on how well they are following safe work procedures, you can expect your comments to have a strong positive influence on the desired behavior.

This type of involvement should be a fairly routine occurrence. If it happens only “once in a blue moon,” it will not have significant impact. It only works for managers who are out in operational areas several times a week.

To catch and correct hazards, you also must have a thorough knowledge of what is safe. The manager who lacks expertise or is unsure of his/her knowledge should not try to interfere with lower level managers and supervisors who do possess shop safety expertise.

A more formal method of getting out where you can be seen is to conduct surprise inspections. These inspections must occur often enough to make a difference. Housekeeping inspections are the variety most commonly performed by top managers, possible because the plant or site manager need not be a safety or health expert to spot housekeeping violations or problems. However, such inspections do not merely provide an opportunity for management visibility: good housekeeping contributes significantly to safe and healthful conditions. Some managers give positive or negative points during these inspections and award prizes or a rotating trophy to the department that does the best.

A plant manager can accomplish much the same result by unexpectedly accompanying the safety committee or safety and health professional during a regularly scheduled inspection. Again, the element of surprise and the frequency of the manager's involvement are important.

## BEING ACCESSIBLE

If you "manage by walking around," you will find many opportunities to listen and respond to employee questions and comments. But even if your duties prevent you from spending much time in the site's operations areas, you still can make yourself available to your employees through more formal systems. Take care, however, that your involvement does not undercut the authority of the managers and supervisors you have given primary responsibility for ensuring safety and health. Being accessible means walking a careful line between encouraging employees to use that access and interfering with their normal relationships and responsibilities. Appendix 3-1 at the end of this chapter offers tips on achieving this necessary balance.

Open Door Policy. If your managerial work keeps you in your office, an "open door" policy might be a good choice for you. Your office door must actually remain open, either continually or during regularly scheduled and well-communicated time periods. This technique may not work for managers who must have frequent closed-door meetings. Employees should be encouraged to drop by and discuss their safety and concerns, without fear of reprisal, if they could not get satisfactory answers through normal supervisory channels.

Employees should not be required to make an appointment. That will discourage all but the most determined. Remember, you want to make this a casual, informal tool so that everyone will feel comfortable with it. Chances are once employees test your policy and word gets around that your door really is open, employees will not make frequent use of this access if your other Meeting systems are working well. Consequently, you need not be concerned about frequent visits that could disrupt your other duties. (See Chapters 4 and 8.)

The Bypass Meeting. If you cannot spend much time in operations areas, and your need for private meetings preclude an open door, you can schedule periodic bypass meetings. Here the top manager and hourly employees bypass middle-level personnel and talk directly to one another. These meetings are usually open for any questions, comments or concerns that employees may have, but they are particularly useful as a forum for health and safety issues. The size of the group probably should not exceed 200, so in larger businesses more than one meeting may be required to hear all employees. Some top managers choose to hold a separate bypass meeting with first-line supervisors and other managers with whom they do not regularly interact. You may need to try various group sizes before finding the one that best fits your style.

The success of a bypass meeting will depend on you, the top official at the worksite: whether you create a climate where employees feel free to speak up and how you handle the questions they raise. Treat all questions with respect, even if, from your perspective, the answer seems simple or the concern unwarranted. Try to imagine how the situation looks to the employee. Take the time to give a clear explanation. When you don't know the answer to a question, or when you need to know more about the circumstances surrounding an issue, don't be afraid to say so. Be sure, however, that you follow up thoroughly and that all employees who attended the meeting see or hear your response.

Try to steer the conversation to questions or concern that your employees may have. In a small group such as this, some people may be frightened to speak up about perceived problems. Aim for a warm atmosphere that encourages a frank exchange. Otherwise, most of the suggestions for a successful bypass meeting also will hold true for the birthday lunch.

## BEING AN EXAMPLE

Providing a good example is one of the most important ways management can become visibly involved in safety and health.

Following the Rules. Make sure you know all the rules that employees are expected to follow. Then make sure you and your subordinate managers follow them scrupulously. Your workplace may have some rules that apply only to people who will be working with specified equipment. To the extent practical, you and your managers should also follow these rules even if you are just visiting for a few minutes and will not be working directly with the equipment.

Setting an Example for Supervisors. If you see an infraction of the rules or safe work practices, never let it go uncorrected. Your insistence on working in a safe and healthful manner will be a model for your supervisors.

## TAKING CHARGE

Make it clear to everyone that you are in charge of ensuring that your site is a safe and healthful place to work. One technique widely used in the chemical industry is for the site manager to chair the central safety committee. But taking charge of safety and health protection also means holding your subordinate managers and supervisors accountable. And it means insisting that any contract work at your site be done in a safe and healthful manner.

Chairing the Central Safety and Health Committee. In its usual form, the central committee is made up of the worksite executive staff. At some sites, hourly employees occupy two or three positions. Employee membership can be rotated throughout the hourly workforce to provide maximum training and awareness experience.

By chairing this committee, attending regularly and participating actively, you show your subordinate managers and employees that you are taking charge of safety and health protection. The committee, of course, must have serious tasks to accomplish, and it should meet at least monthly.

You should not confuse the central safety and health committee with a joint employee-management committee. For information on the latter, see Chapter 4.

Insisting on Accountability. Whatever your workplace's formal system of accountability, your employees will watch you for clues to what is important. If you never raise the subject of safety and health with your managers, they eventually will assume that you don't care. Therefore, it is particularly important for you to insist that managers and supervisors all up and down the line

both carry out their own responsibilities and require employees to follow safe work practices. For a more detailed look at safety and health accountability, see Chapter 11.

Ensuring Safe and Healthful Contract Work. The actions of contract workers can have an adverse impact on the safety and health of everyone at the site. Where contract workers and your own employees are intermingled, any unsafe practices or conditions of contract work will jeopardize your own employees. But even if contract workers are removed somewhat from your normal operations, your employees will benefit from knowing that you insist on good safety and health practices and protections for every worker at your worksite.

*Bidding Process.* You should insist that all potential contractors meet certain requirements as a qualification for bidding on your work:

- The contractor must have an acceptable level of experience modifier rate (EMR) set by the company's insurer.
- The contractor must have an implemented safety and health program.

You or your agent should instruct all bidders to include in their costs any expenses necessary to meet OSHA standards and the rules of your worksite. Make sure potential contractors understand that you intend these precautions to be fully met.

Take special care with the company with no known experience. It may have gone by another name last year. There usually is a good reason for a name change, and it probably does not bode well for the performance you can expect.

*Contract Language.* The contract you use should spell out precisely what you expect of the contractor's safety and health program management. If the contractor's work involves potential hazards to your workers and/or the community, then the skill, education and experience requirements for the contractor's employees should be specified. If you expect them to go beyond OSHA standards in certain areas, such as fall protection on a construction contract, then the contract should so state. The following requirements are frequently specified in contracts:

- Employee safety and health orientation and periodic safety and health training/meetings.
- A formally established relationship with a physician and contractor employees at the site who are trained in first aid;
- Regular safety inspections and, where applicable, industrial hygiene monitoring, with discovered hazards to be corrected promptly; and
- An appropriately trained safety and health coordinator.

There also should be specific language in the contract giving your agent the right to:

- Monitor safety and health activities,
- Investigate contractor accidents/incidents,
- Require that any worker who continues to violate safe work practices be removed from the site, and
- Remove the contract company from the site if the requirements of the contract are not being met.

Further, the contract should require that your agent be informed of all chemicals or other hazardous substances the contractor intends to bring onto the worksite.

*Monitoring Contract Work.* Your routine general inspections should include those locations where contract work is being performed. Unsafe work or work violating any part of the contract should be halted and corrected through the appropriate supervisor, if possible. Your agent should check to make sure that contract employees are informed, not only about serious

hazards to which they potentially may be exposed at your site, but also about hazards to which their own company's work may expose them.

Obviously, your own employees also will need to know about, and be prepared to protect themselves against, any hazards associated with the contracted work.

*Follow Through.* Use the safeguards that you put into the contract. If you discover inexperienced laborers being assigned to work that involves significant hazards, despite repeated warnings and the contract clause requiring training, cancel the work and reopen bids. It may cost you some time, but that cost is insignificant compared to the potential loss of time, money and lives if an unqualified contract worker makes the wrong moves.

If, after being corrected and cautioned, certain workers continue to violate safe work practices, remove these workers from the site. If a contract company continues to violate rules or refuses to make corrections, then close the contract. You have the power and obligation to ensure safe and healthful conditions at your worksite.

Let it be known throughout your community that at your place of business only safe and healthful work is acceptable. Eventually, you will find that contract companies willing to insist on safe and healthful work also will be the most efficient and cost effective.

## SUMMARY

As the owner or top manager at a worksite, your visible commitment to safety and health can make a major difference in the quality of worker protection. You can choose among a variety of formal and informal methods and styles for achieving this impact. Small businesses are probably better suited for the more informal approaches.

Prove to everyone in your company that you are vitally interested in worker safety and health. Do this by making yourself accessible: encourage your employees to speak up about safety and health, listen carefully, and then follow through. Set a good example: follow the rules, make time to carry out your safety and health responsibilities, and insist that your managers and supervisors do the same. Make sure everyone understands that you are in charge of a business where safety and health will not be compromised and where hazard awareness and safe work practices are expected of everyone, including on-site contractors and their workers.